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ABSTRACT

This paper answers specific questions about present and future issues concerning the undereducation of Hispanic students. The following topics are covered: (1) the educational status of Hispanics; (2) the role of federal education programs--including Head Start, Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, Chapter 1, Pell Grants, and bilingual education programs--in the education of Hispanics; (3) what an Executive Order on Hispanic Education might achieve; and (4) how the Executive Order might help the nation as a whole. Two charts depicting the number of school years completed by Hispanics and non-Hispanics 25 years old and over, derived from 1970 and 1980 census data and from the March 1988 Current Population Survey, are included, along with a chart depicting the educational achievement of Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics in 1984. (JS)

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REVERSING THE TREND OF HISPANIC UNDEREDUCATION

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE EXECUTIVE ORDER

Q: What is the educational status of Hispanics?

ANSWER: The American educational system is often described as a pipeline, successfully transporting individuals from childhood to college or the world of work. National data indicate that Hispanics are slipping through the cracks of the educational pipeline at disproportionate rates -- making Hispanics the most undereducated subgroup in the country.

- Almost one-third or 28% of Hispanic children in grades one through four are enrolled below grade level, compared to 25% of Black children and 20% of White children. Studies have shown that being held back is related to a student's propensity to drop out of high school; students held back are 40% to 50% more likely to drop out of school. The Hispanic school drop out rate is approximately 50% nationwide.

- In 1987 only 51% of Hispanics 25 years old and over completed four years or more of high school, compared to 78% of non-Hispanics. In addition, nearly three-quarters of Hispanic students have been placed in non-academic curriculum tracks -- which inhibits acceptance to institutions of higher learning.

- In 1988 only 10% of Hispanics 25 years old and over completed four or more years of college, compared to 21% of non-Hispanics. Moreover, the percentage of Hispanic high school graduates entering college has been steadily decreasing since 1976.

- As a result of undereducation, starting from elementary school and continuing through postsecondary education -- as much as 56% of Hispanics are functionally illiterate.

Thus, if the educational system is analogous to a pipeline, too few Hispanics are successfully transported from one end of the pipeline to the other -- and too many are re-routed to a life of undereducation and diminished employment opportunities.

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Q: What role do federal education programs play in the education of Hispanics?

ANSWER:

Many problems faced by Hispanic students can and have been addressed by a variety of federal initiatives including: bilingual education programs, Headstart, Chapter 1, and Pell Grants. However, these programs serve only a minority of the eligible population; Hispanics in particular are underrepresented.

** Head Start is widely renowned as one of the most effective child development programs in the country, providing preschool children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet a child's educational, emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. Headstart's current budget of $1.13 billion serves less than 19% of the 2.4 million eligible children. The poverty rate for all Hispanic children (children who are under 18 years old) in 1987 was 39.6%. However, the Hispanic participation rate for Head Start's 1987-88 program year was only 22%, compared to 38% for Blacks and 33% for Whites.

** Chapter 1 is the largest of the federal elementary and secondary school programs. This program is targeted towards students who are both educationally and economically disadvantaged. The federal government spends $3.8 billion a year on Chapter 1 and only half of those eligible are actually served. Again, in 1987 39.6% of all Hispanic children (under 18 years old) were living in poverty; however, in the 1986-87 program year the Hispanic participation rate was only 24%, compared to 28% for Blacks and 44% for Whites.

** Pell Grants were designed to enable economically disadvantaged students to attend postsecondary institutions. In the mid-seventies they accounted for about 80% of student funding -- today Pell Grants account for only 15% of student funding. Meanwhile, the cost of attending post secondary institutions rose 129% between 1979-80 and 1986-87. For many Hispanics a college education is out of reach due to economic factors. Furthermore, approximately 40% of Hispanic students who graduate from college will find themselves in financial debt. In the fall of 1986 approximately 40% of Hispanics received financial aid, compared to 55.7% of Blacks and 32.0% of Whites, despite the fact that Hispanics are more than three times as likely to be poor than Whites.

** Federal bilingual education programs serve less than one-sixth of the eligible limited-English proficient population. Furthermore, funding for bilingual programs has been consistently cut since 1980.

Thus, while federal initiatives have the capacity to help reverse the trend of Hispanic undereducation, they rarely target Hispanics adequately. An Executive Order would ensure that existing programs adequately serve Hispanics.

Q: What would an Executive Order on Hispanic Education achieve?

ANSWER:

An Executive Order on Hispanic Education can both tangibly and symbolically provide a federal response to the Hispanic educational crisis.

** The Executive Order would require executive agencies to: (1) assess the level of Hispanic participation in federal education-related programs; (2) develop plans to ensure that Hispanics are equitably served in such programs; (3) develop plans to ensure the representation of Hispanics in the federal education decision-making process; and (4) develop and support promising, innovative model programs.

** An Executive Order on Hispanic Education would be a bold step, symbolizing the President's commitment to excellence in education for all children. To Hispanics, it would demonstrate that the administration, as well as all executive agencies, are prepared to actively participate in the effort to reverse the trend of undereducation in the Hispanic community.

** Furthermore, in a time of federal budget constraints, an Executive Order on Hispanic Education -- since it calls for no new funds -- seems the most appropriate means the President has to address the Hispanic educational crisis.

** Finally, such an Executive Order would set a precedent for future administrations, ensuring that the education of Hispanics continues to be at the top of the federal agenda.

Q: How can the Executive Order help the Nation as a whole?

ANSWER:

The Hispanic population in the United States has more than doubled in the past 20 years, and by the year 2000 is expected to be almost three times as large as it was in 1970. By the year 2000 at least 10% of all workers will be Hispanic. An Executive Order is a crucial initiative not only because it responds to the educational needs of Hispanics, but to the needs of the nation as a whole.

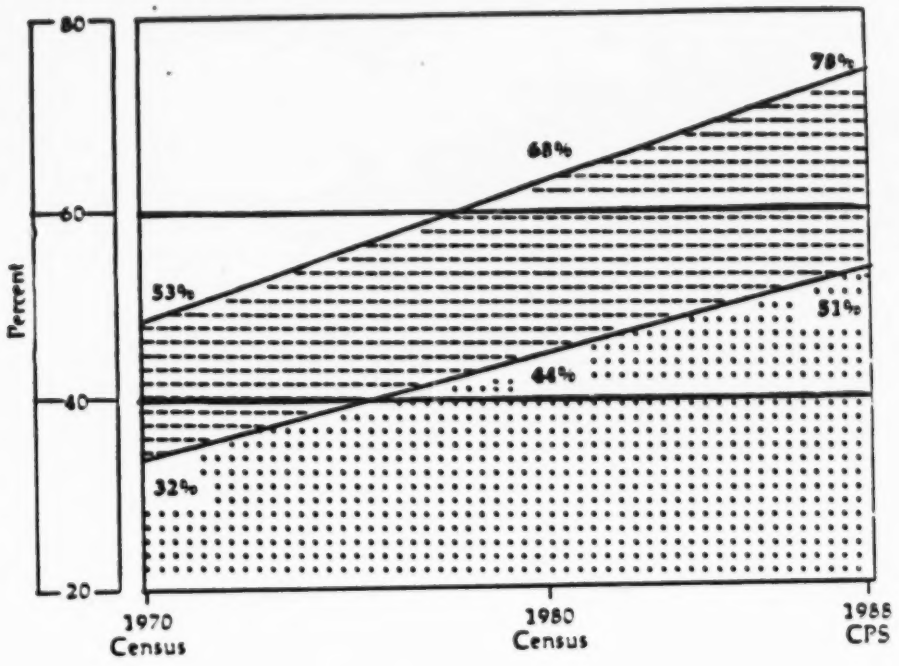
** In an increasingly competing international market it is crucial that we produce as many skilled workers as possible. As out technology changes, requiring higher levels of literacy and education for gainful employment, productive citizenship and effective national defense, it is particularly important to improve the national level of education.

** As members of the current, predominantly white workforce retire Americans will depend increasingly upon the earnings of minority workers to support the Social Security System. Improved education of Hispanics will result in better jobs, a rise in labor force participation and real medium income. This improved economic status will help the minority workforce of tomorrow support the needs of an aging population.

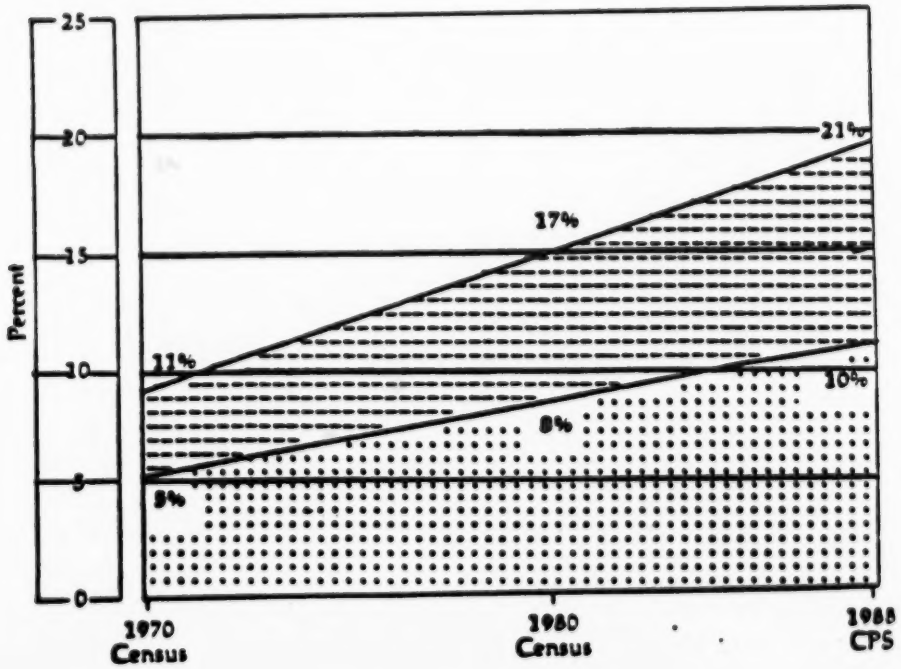
** Youth who complete high school are less likely than dropouts to be unemployed or underemployed, less likely to become involved with drugs, less likely to be incarcerated, and more likely to be long-term independent tax payers. Educating the nation's people is an investment in human resources which will lead to lower long-term costs for public assistance, social services, criminal services and higher tax revenues and productivity for the nation.

Years of School Completed by Persons 25 Years Old and Over: March 1988 CPS and 1970 and 1980 Censuses

4 Years of High School

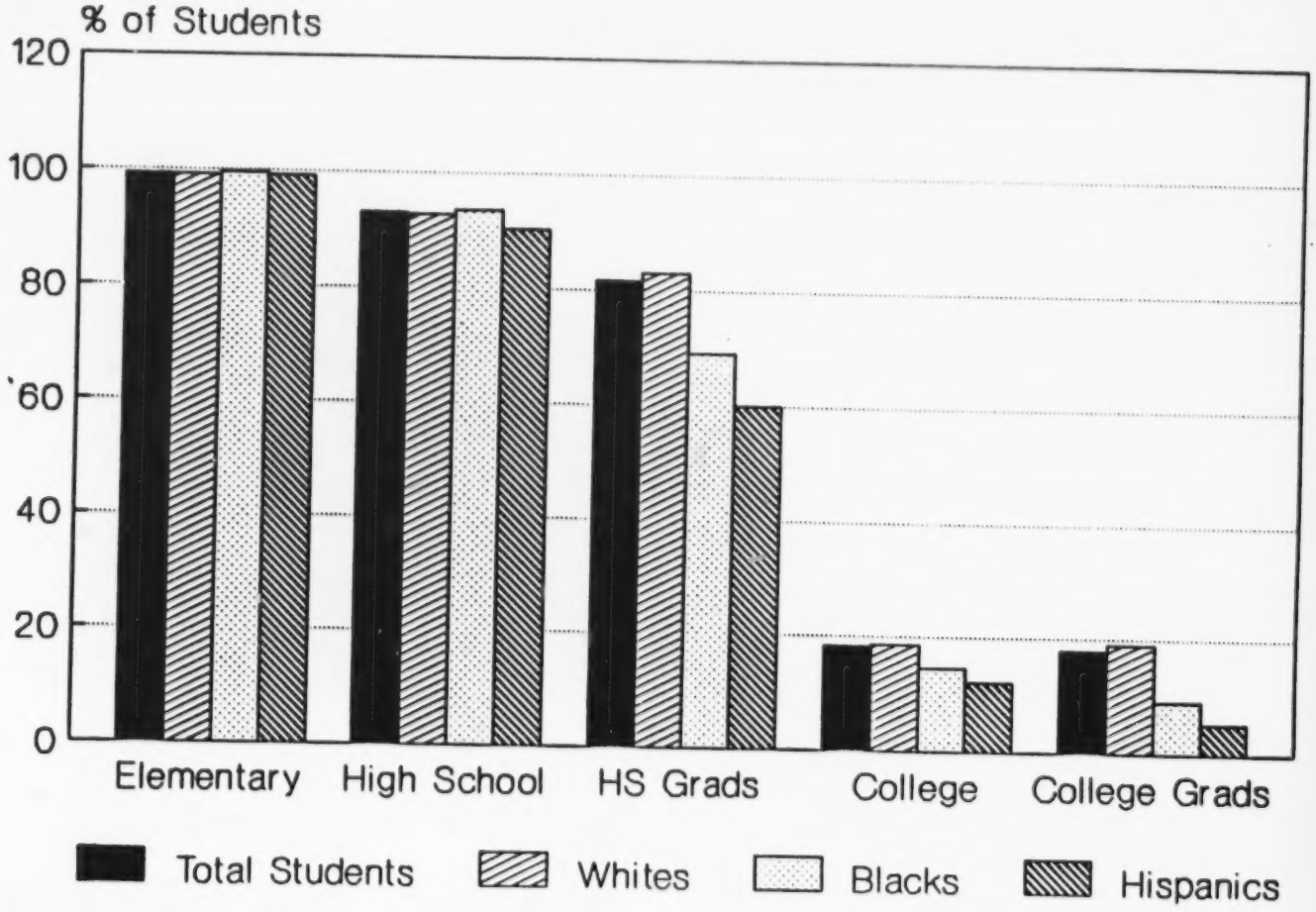


4 Years of College



HISPANIC NOT HISPANIC

Educational Pipeline
By Race and Ethnicity



Source: Current Population Survey, 10/84